

Seventy-second session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo, Egypt, 15–17 October 2024

Report by the Chair, H.E. Dr Salih Al Hasnawi, Minister of Health of Iraq

INTRODUCTION

The 72nd session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean was held in Cairo, Egypt, on 15–17 October 2025 as an in-person meeting.

PART 1: TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

Resolutions and decisions of regional interest adopted by the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly and the Executive Board at its 156th and 157th sessions

The Regional Committee received a presentation on resolutions and decisions of regional interest adopted by the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly and the Executive Board at its 156th and 157th sessions. Major outcomes of recent global governance meetings were highlighted including adoption of the global Pandemic Agreement, agreement of a 20% increase in assessed contributions, Member State-led governance reform to improve WHO's transparency, efficiency and accountability, and the adoption of decision WHA77.15 on aligning the participation of Palestine in WHO with its participation in the United Nations. Other issues included: WHA78.5/EB156(19) on promoting and prioritizing an integrated lung health approach; WHA78.7/EB156(21) on primary prevention and integrated care for sensory impairments, including vision impairment and hearing loss; WHA78.9 on fostering social connection for global health; WHA78.18/EB156(30) on regulating the digital marketing of breast-milk substitutes; WHA78.24/EB156(37) on comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition; WHA78(27)/EB156(40) on global action plan on climate change and health; WHA78.8/EB156(22) on World Cervical Cancer Elimination Day; WHA78.27/EB156(32) on galvanizing global support for a lead-free future; WHA78.17/EB156(29) on World Prematurity Day; WHA78(12)/EB156(25) on substandard and falsified medical products; WHA78(14)/EB156(28) on the WHO traditional medicine strategy 2025–2034; WHA78.6/EB156(20) on promotion of kidney health – prevention and control of kidney disease; WHA78.11/EB156(15) on rare diseases: a global health priority for equity and inclusion; WHA78.12 on strengthening health financing globally; WHA78.16/EB156(27) on accelerating action on the global health and care workforce by 2030; WHA78.4/EB156.R3 on health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; WHA78.28 on the effect of nuclear war on public health; WHA78.3/EB156(31) on strengthening the evidence-base for public health and social measures; and WHA78.10/EB156(14) on strengthening national capacities in evidence-based decision-making for the uptake and impact of norms and standards.

Review of the draft provisional agenda of the 158th session of the WHO Executive Board

The Regional Committee received a presentation on the draft provisional agenda of the 158th Session of the WHO Executive Board.

PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Zero-dose children: addressing inequity in routine immunization coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region¹

The Regional Committee received a presentation on addressing inequity in routine immunization coverage in the Region, focusing in particular on the disproportionately high number of zero-dose children in marginalized, conflict-affected and underserved settings. Recognizing that rubella elimination is both technically and programmatically feasible through integrated strategies using existing measles infrastructure, Member States committed to adopting a regional goal for rubella and CRS elimination and implementing rubella and CRS elimination strategies as part of efforts to strengthen routine immunization systems and achieve universal health coverage.

Health systems recovery in fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region²

The Regional Committee received a presentation on ensuring effective health systems recovery in fragile and conflict-affected situations in the Region. It was noted that this was a critical issue in the Region, with nine of its 22 countries and territories classified by the World Bank as FCS as of 2025. Mindful of the multiple negative direct and indirect impacts of protracted crises on health systems, the Regional Committee endorsed a new regional agenda for health systems recovery which sets out regional priorities, goals, objectives, priority areas and implementation steps to support Member States in advancing health systems recovery.

Palliative care in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: from challenges to solutions³

The Regional Committee received a presentation on improving palliative care in the Region. Acknowledging the many benefits of palliative care across disease groups, at all stages of illness and for all age groups, and recognizing that access to palliative care is a basic human right, the Committee endorsed a new regional framework for action on palliative care and urged all Member States to include palliative care services in their national health benefit packages and universal health coverage policies.

Strengthening national laboratory biosafety and biosecurity policies and frameworks in the Eastern Mediterranean Region⁴

The Regional Committee received a presentation on strengthening national laboratory biosafety and biosecurity policies and frameworks in the Region. Concerned that there was limited data and evidence on laboratory biosafety and biosecurity in the Region, and that governance and regulation in this area had not been prioritized, the Committee urged Member States to develop and implement frameworks and increase investment in related health workforce capacities and research.

¹ [EM/RC72/R.2.](#)

² [EM/RC72/R.3.](#)

³ [EM/RC72/R.4.](#)

⁴ [EM/RC72/R.5.](#)

Developing a regional operational framework and implementation plan for climate change and health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region⁵

The Regional Committee received a presentation on developing a regional operational framework and implementation plan for climate change and health in the Region. Recognizing that the Region faces growing climate-related health challenges, the Committee urged Member States to finalize a new regional operational plan on climate change and health, to complement the existing regional framework for action in this area.

Other topics of regional significance⁶

The Regional Committee reviewed and adopted the annual report of the Regional Director on the work of WHO in the Region for 2024/2025 and received progress reports and updates on various areas, including (among others) emergencies and polio eradication and transition in the Region. The Committee welcomed the progress so far in rolling out the new strategic operational plan for the Region and its constituent flagship initiatives, but noted with concern the many gaps and challenges that remain and the severe financial constraints facing WHO and other public health stakeholders.

The Committee urged Member States to strengthen domestic financing for health and consider increasing their voluntary support to WHO where possible. It also extended the implementation period for the regional strategy on integrated disease surveillance, and expressed its support for the finalization and implementation of a new cholera preparedness and response strategy for the Region as well as a new regional framework for implementing the defeating meningitis by 2030 global road map.

⁵ [EM/RC72/R.6](#).

⁶ EM/RC72/R.1.